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Jack Anderson

Mexico City Chief Denies Drug Ties

Arturo Durazo Moreno, chief of police of Mexico City, was named in a secret Mexican intelligence report in 1975 as one of many big shots involved in illegal narcotics trafficking. U.S. intelligence sources say there is no evidence he has severed his connections with the underworld.

At the time of the secret report, Durazo Moreno was chief of election campaign security for Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo. Durazo Moreno was appointed to his present powerful job shortly after Lopez Portillo took office in December 1976.

We contacted Durazo Moreno at his Mexico City office, and he vehemently denied the charge. He told us that both he and President Lopez Portillo have copies of a U.S. State Department document clearing him of implication in the drug racketeering that infected various levels of Mexican officialdom in 1975.

A State Department official refused to confirm or deny the police chief's claim, saying that such information would be considered classified. But earlier U.S. intelligence documents make no bones about Durazo Moreno's involvement in the narcotics traffic. A secret dispatch of March 2, 1976, for example, states that "discussions were begun on how to proceed against the notorious Arturo Durazo . . ."

The discussions obviously didn't amount to much. Durazo Moreno not only escaped prosecution, he was promoted.

Other Mexican officials were not so lucky. U.S. intelligence sources reported that the attorney-general and the federal attorney for the state of Colima, the entire state attorney's staff at Tijuana and key federal and police officials were

fired in a wide-ranging shakeup by outgoing President Luis Echeverria.

One U.S. intelligence report indicates that many Mexican judicial officials were protecting big time drug traffickers: the going rate for police protection was \$80,000 a month. This was usually paid to the local police commander, who not only guaranteed freedom to operate but even provided police escorts for drug shipments on occasion, the secret report states.

U.S. intelligence experts doubted whether Echeverria's crackdown would reach politically powerful individuals—like Durazo Moreno. "Most of the accused gained office because of their standing in the governing party, and often because they were personal friends of the president or his closest associates," a secret U.S. document noted. "Any wholesale housecleaning would cause cracks in the power structure."

Therefore, the analysts concluded, "the president will probably continue gradually to transfer or dismiss the corrupt officials." The report added this gloomy warning: "Often a corrupt official is removed only to be replaced by an equally corrupt one."

Footnote: One part of Echeverria's narcotics cleanup campaign had a perhaps lasting beneficial effect. That was the spraying of Mexican poppy fields with herbicide. The resulting drop in supply led drug dealers to "cut" the heroin sold to U.S. junkies from over 6 percent in 1976 to 4.9 percent in 1978. This in turn may have contributed to a dramatic drop in the number of fatal heroin overdoses in the United States—from 1,597 in 1976 to 596 in 1978.